



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

**Testimony of Merrill Gay
Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Education Committee
March 12, 2014**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee,

I am Merrill Gay, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth through age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security. I am here to testify in support of **H.B. No. 5522 AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL READINESS FUNDING.**

Connecticut's school readiness preschool program was created in 1997. Since then it has grown to serve 11,310 children last year. In those 16 years, there has been one increase in the per child reimbursement rate. That increase was in 2006 and it increased the full-day, full-year rate from \$8,000 per child to \$8,346. It is important to understand that there are four different types of school readiness slot with four different reimbursement rates. The charts below focus on the three slot types that account for 98% of the money.

Table 1

Slot type	Hours	Current Annual Rate per child	Current Hourly Rate
Full-Day, Full-Year	10 hours x 240 days* per year = 2400 hours	\$8,346	\$3.47
School-Day, School-Year	6 hours x 180 days per year = 1080 hours	\$6,000	\$5.56
Part-Day, School-Year	2.5 hours x 180 days per year = 450 hours	\$4,500	\$10.00

*Programs are required to be open 10 hours per day 50 weeks out of the year. 240 days accounts for 10 holidays.

Since 2006, inflation has consumed 16% of the purchasing power of the school readiness dollar. So at first blush, Governor Malloy's proposal (SB 26) to increase school readiness rates by 3% across the board sounded like a nice but small step in the right direction. However, when viewed through the lens of the hourly rate, the governor's proposal will exacerbate a problem that has existed since the beginning of school readiness, which is the hourly rate differential between full day year round programs and the school year programs.

Table 2

Slot type	Current Hourly Rate	Governor's Proposal SB 26 Hourly Rate	HB 5522 Hourly Rate
Full Day Full Year	\$3.47	\$3.58	\$3.75
School Day School Year	\$5.56	\$5.72	\$5.56
Part Day School Year	\$10.00	\$10.30	\$10.00
Differential between Full Day and Part Day hourly rate	\$ 6.53	\$6.72	\$6.25

Bill 5522 would focus the increase the in School Readiness rates on the full-day, full-year slots that comparatively have been under funded since the inception of the program. It would raise the annual per child reimbursement rate for full day; full year preschool programs from \$8,346 to \$9,000. This would reduce the hourly rate differential by 28 cents while the governor's proposal would increase the differential by 19 cents. Bill 5522 is a modest proposal, the \$654 increase for full-day, full-year slots is a 7.8% increase or less than half of what inflation has consumed since the last increase in 2006.

I know that you will hear from others in the early childhood community today about the true costs to provide a high quality preschool experience. Please understand that in full-day, full-year preschool programs, the second largest source of subsidy for preschool after the school readiness grant is the forgone wages of the preschool staff who are earning \$10,000 to \$15,000 less than they would in their first year if they worked in the public school. Bill 5522 will not solve the problem, but it is a step in the right direction and I urge you to support it.

Thank you for listening and I will be happy to answer questions.



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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee,

I am Merrill Gay, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth through age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security. I am here to testify in support of SB424 ***AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.***

As we have testified before, the Alliance strongly supports the goal of universal access to preschool. Currently the State Department of Education reports that 80% of children statewide have attended some preschool prior to kindergarten. Compare that to the just 56% of preschool age children in DCF care and custody who are attending preschool. This statistic is startling and demands attention. The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance strongly urges you to support SB424.

This bill will impact the 395 children ages three and four year old who were in such dangerous situations that DCF has removed them from their families. By last count, 220 of these children were not attending preschool. By all measures these are some of the most traumatized and most needy children in the state. As we move towards the goal of universal access to preschool, it is clear that this group of children should be moved to the front of the line. Providing these children with a consistent, high quality early childhood experience where they can enjoy caring relationships with their teachers and make friends with classmates can play an important part in their healing.

On a policy level it is very clear that requiring DCF to enroll children under their care in a high quality preschool program makes sense. On a practical level, however traumatized children present a set of behaviors and issues that can be extremely challenging for a preschool teacher. In order for this common sense approach to work, DCF will need to support both the children in their care, and the preschool staff working with them to ensure the best outcomes for the children. The child will not be helped, and may indeed suffer further trauma, if they are repeatedly moved from one preschool to another as the result of challenging behaviors beyond the capacity of the preschool staff. DCF should be prepared to work closely with preschool staff

supporting them with professional development and on going coaching in dealing with a child's individual issues.



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**Testimony of Merrill Gay
Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Appropriations Committee
March 12, 2014**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Committee,

I am Merrill Gay, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth through age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security.

I am here to testify in support of **SR 9 and HR 5 APPROVING THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE CONNECTICUT STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION (CSEA-SEIU LOCAL 2001).**

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance urges you to support SR 9 and HR 5 to approve the collective bargaining agreement between the state of Connecticut and the home based childcare providers who care for children subsidized by the Care4kids program.

Frankly it is embarrassing that Connecticut hasn't raised the rate it pays for childcare under Care4kids since 2001. Home based providers have suffered the lowest of rates with kith and kin providers being paid just \$89 a week. Even when they care for 3 children they have earned less than minimum wage. This agreement is the first step in righting that wrong. Over the next four years it will phase in increases and tie rates to the minimum wage.

We urge you to support SR 9 and HR5.